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	January 5, 1983	
MEMORANDUM FOR:	National Intelligence Officer for Near East	
	South Asia	
FROM:	Chief, Pakistan/Afghanistan/Bangladesh Branch,	
	NESA, DDI	
SUBJECT:	Afghanistan: Potential for Soviet Airfield	
	Construction	
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Attached is	our response to the DCI's inquiry on the above	
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SUBJECT:	Afghanistan: Construction	Potential	for Soviet	Airfield	25X1
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Afghanistan: Potential for Soviet Airfield Construction	
The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan clearly has grave strategic implications for the area and gives Moscow a potential base from which to further threaten Iran and Pakistan. Nonetheless, Soviet military activities in Afghanistan are currently aimed against the insurgency. In particular, the apparent intent of Soviet airfield improvements there, as is to increase the number of helicopters in Afghanistan and to expand the maintenance capabilities of Soviet air units engaged in operations against the insurgents. A key indicator of a shift in Soviet focus would be if Moscow began constructing an airfield in southwestern Afghanistan significantly closer to the Persian Gulf than existing bases.	25X1 25X1
A new Soviet airfield in southwestern Afghanistan would increase Soviet tactical air coverage of southeastern Iran, but we judge that it would give the Soviets few advantages in attacking targets in the Persian Gulf, the Strait of Hormuz, or on the Arabian Peninsula. Of Soviet tactical aircraft, only the SU-24 Fencer tactical bomber would be within effective operational range of the Strait of Hormuz from an airfield built in southwestern Afghanistan. Assuming realistic combat mission profiles that anticipate possible US or Persian Gulf opposition, MIG-27 and SU-17 fighter-bombers would be unable to reach targets in the Persian Gulf from a new airfield and MIG-23 fighters would be operating at the limits of their effective range. Soviet medium bombersincluding Backfire and Badgerwould not require airbases in Afghanistan to be within range of the Persian Gulf, but could be based in the USSR.	25X1
Building a major airbase in southwestern Afghanistan would be costly, time-consuming, and confront nearly insurmountable logistical difficulties. Imagery indicates that the construction of new airbases in the USSR that are capable of sustaining tactical air operations requires a minimum of three years. Moreover, Soviet airbases are typically located along major lines of communication, usually including rail lines. There is virtually no logistical infrastructure in southwestern Afghanistan to support building a new airbase. The Soviets would need to build a road capable of supporting sustained traffic by heavy vehicles and equipment in order to transport the necessary building materials, particularly the large concrete slabs used for constructing runways. The distance from the existing main road connecting the cities of Qandahar and Farah with the USSR to the southwestern corner of Afghanistan is over 100 miles.	25x1 25X1
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combat operations Afghanistan would the capabilities o	also require lo	gistics support	probably beyond	25 X 1
area.	or the existing	primitive road i	network in the	25
The Afghan in prevent the construction of the	cuction and oper anistan. The So	ation of an airs	d to assign at	2

Effective Combat Radii of Selected Soviet Tactical Aircraft

MIG-23 fighter

 $800\ km.$, optimum mission profile $400\ km.$, probable mission profile

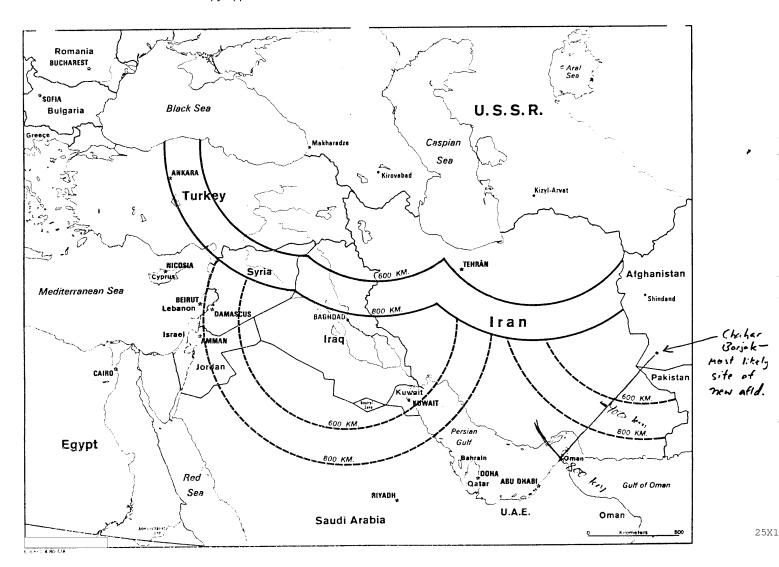
SU-17 fighter-bomber

600 km., optimum mission profile 300 km., probable mission profile

SU-24 tactical bomber

700-800 km., probable mission profile

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